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EDITORIAL

WHEN a snicker swept across the conference room in Syracuse at mention of the name of Jesus, it was obvious that no reverence worthy of a religious convocation was present. What is even more tragic is that the sociological principle concerning the permanence of attitudes will make it very difficult if not impossible for any individual or any church or group of churches to counteract this spirit of irreverence manifested at the formative convention in Syracuse where the attitude of the new church was established. This attitude will tend to fix itself as the normal viewpoint of the national body of the newly proposed church. Every decent and sensitive person may well reject the decisions of Syracuse with no other reason for doing so. Even the Moslems say, "Blessed be his name," when the name of Jesus is mentioned. We do not know of any religion in the world that has made a contribution on the basis of irreverence. It does not command nor deserve public respect. This is the greatest single short-coming in the newly proposed Unitarian-Universalist Church, and we do not think any number of by-laws or actions can make up for this weakness.

In his novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Goethe expressed his opinion on the true nature of wisdom when he classified it as an attitude of reverence. Wisdom, he stated, meant reverence for things above and beyond us, reverence for things on our own level, and reverence for things beneath us. Reverence and wisdom are linked insolubly together, so we are questioning the foundations of the proposed new church.

There is an expressed determination in the new constitution that no minister may be asked about his religious beliefs or be asked to comply with any specific doctrine or idea. We think this negative assertation is likewise the flaunting of a spirit of defiance in the face of age-old beliefs in goodness, decency, and a creative outlook. It is as though a medical doctor could not be asked about his opinions in medicine or a lawyer asked his general adjustment to law and its administration. Better that this matter should not have been mentioned in the new constitution at all; but since the ministry has been so negatively protected in this proposed new church, its clergy might as well be made up of Roman Catholic priests, Buddhist monks, or communist agents. The religious adjustments of the individual clergymen are henceforth sacrosanct. We do not know what kind of ministry would demand this negative kind of protection, but the very provision causes the ministry to be suspect. (God help the church, and God help the people in the developments which may follow).

There is an intellectually sloppy and unjustifiably sentimental notion in the church at large and warmly praised at Syracuse to the effect that we should embrace all religions equally. This idea is made popular in certain sentimental books on comparative religions which tend to make the various religious teachers of mankind look through our eyes, and using our vocabulary, emphasize the same general teachings. This is a great distortion of fact as may be discerned by a more careful study of the great religions of the world. For one year, this writer sat in an assembly of scholars from other nations and other religions, and there we frankly and rather thoroughly discussed these matters after papers were read by those best prepared to write them. It became very obvious that most of our books of comparative religion are written by people who have made surface judgments, begging the questions and the conclusions on the basis of their own wishful thinking. There is not

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The Implications of Syracuse—A Panel Discussion

Jack D. Zoerheide
Ronald M. Mazur
Harry H. Hoehler
Manuel R. Holland

The Plymouth Colony Conference of Unitarian and Universalist Churches, at its January meeting at the First Universalist Church in Weymouth, presented a panel discussion by four young ministers. The subject of the panel was the controversal Article II, Section 2, of the Plan of Consolidation adopted at the Joint Biennial Conference held in Syracuse last October. The papers of the four panelists are presented below.

The Reverend Jack D. Zoerheide is a graduate of the Harvard Divinity School and is minister of The First Parish in Needham, Mass.

The purpose of my remarks in this discussion is twofold: to give one delegate's interpretation of why the amendment adopted at Syracuse which referred to the Judeo-Christian tradition was preferred by a majority over the amendment which included the name of Jesus, and, secondly, to make some observations about the debate which this action aroused.

The debate at Syracuse centered about the Merger Commission's amendment to the original statement of purpose in the familiar blue book. You will recall that this amendment read:

> "To cherish and spread the universal truths taught by Jesus and the other great prophets and teachers of humanity in every age and tradition, and prophetically expressed in the Judeo-Christian tradition as love to God and love to man."

After heated debate at periodic intervals eventually the controversy over this wording was resolved in the amendment before us. The controversy did not center over the adjective "universal" in describing the nature of truth but over the singling out of our heritage the the person of Jesus and the inference that his teachings are the principal source of universal truth.

After heated debate this amendment lost and, I believe, for very good reasons. In the first place it is open to serious question as to historical accuracy. Prophets of the Old Testament era – Amos, Hosea, Isaiah – taught ethical standards out of a deep love for God and man long before the time of Jesus. As a Jew in direct spiritual lineage with the prophets, Jesus gave a new impetus and articulation to these ancient principles of Judaism. Even if it is believed that he originated them, the argument that he understood them in a universal rather than a nationalistic sense must move directly in the face of many facts to the contrary.

Secondly, this amendment did not satisfy the majority of delegates at Syracuse because it is prejudicial to the memory and life of one human being in a heritage built upon the sacrificial lives of many.

Do we want to say by implication in our statement of purpose that our tradition owes everything to Jesus and nothing to those who struggled for the betterment of humanity before and after him? Did Jesus owe nothing to Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah and countless other Jews before him? Does Christianity owe nothing to Paul, Aquinas, Augustine, Calvin, Luther? Do Unitarianism and Universalism born out of the Judeo-Christian tradition owe everything to the sacrifice of Jesus and nothing to the martyrdom of Servetus, the genius of Channing, the reforming zeal of Parker, the ethical insight of Emerson, the moral example of Schweitzer? The majority of delegates at Syracuse, I believe, did not want by implication to make any such inference in a statement of purpose.

Thirdly, though perhaps with fewer supporters, strong concern was voiced that the amendment discriminated against great teachers of humanity outside the Judeo-Christian tradition who, along with Jesus or apart from him, are sources of high religious and moral inspiration to liberal religious people. Socrates, an intellectual giant and great moral teacher, is one example. Buddha, Confucius and Gandhi are examples in non-Jewish, non-Christian traditions.

From these objections and in view of the present character of liberal religion it is easy to see why the amendment lost and also why the new amendment proposed during the heat of debate was, after two ill-fated attempts, finally passed as an acceptable compromise between the Christo-centric minority and the universal-centered majority.

If there must be a theological statement in our plan for consolidation, this one, I believe, is the most satisfactory of all thus far presented. However, I am of the opinion that a creedal statement has no rightful place in the consitutional framework of a free religious faith.

The debate, as it has taken place since Syracuse in Unitarian gatherings and in the newspapers, strikes me as entirely worthy of a denomination which takes its stand among men on that often idealized, but too seldom utilized, free mind principle. That among those who did not attend Syracuse there would be some who felt their personal religious beliefs supported or threatened by the action taken there can only be explained on personal grounds and does not require a court of inquiry concerning the proper function of the democratic process in our denomination. It is the high privilege of every Unitarian and Universalist to make his voice heard whether or not he approves of action taken in denominational meeting.

However, on the part of those who were there I have heard nothing but words of marvel and inspired appreciation of the fact that so many could do so much in so few hours and with such high regard for individual expression of opinion. As one minister wrote of the convention:

> "The Spirit of Syracuse was one of unity of of purpose. It was dynamic in its insistence on agreement after long and thoughtful debate. It was humble in the moment of victory. It was conciliatory in adding the recognition of the historical tradition out of which it has come, adding it by a unanimous vote. . . ."

There is one final thought I would express and this is the fervent hope that whatever our likes or dislikes about Section Two of Article Two of the "Plan" we will not lose sight of the deep spiritual significance of the five other statements set down in this Article.

These words speak of giving strength to one another in a free and disciplined search for truth, affirming the supreme worth of every human personality, using the democratic process in human relationships, implimenting the vision of one world, serving denominational needs, and cooperating with men of good will everywhere.

Whether Unitarians or Universalists or people in any other denomination could unanimously agree over the meaning and place of Jesus of Nazareth in human history or could describe in one neat sentence the source of truth out of which flows the direction of their individual lives is, to say the least, doubtful. But that the delegates at Syracuse, a thousand strong, could and did unite in unquestioned agreement on affirmations concerning the search for truth, human dignity and the democratic process strikes to the heart of the meaning of liberal religion today. For it is in these matters of the spirit that we stand together in confrontation of the problems and perils visited upon mankind in a quest for survival.

Our second panelist is the Reverend Harry H. Hoehler. Mr. Hoehler is a graduate of Haverford College and the Harvard Divinity School. He is minister of The First Parish in Beverly, Mass.

As a New England minister who has endeavored to make his ancient church covenant relevant to a modern congregation of a wide range of theological opinion, I can appreciate, I think, some of the difficulties the Merger Commission faced as it attempted to draft a statement of purpose which would be meaningful and yet acceptable to the great variety of ideologies represented within our two associations. Syracuse proved, at least, that the Commission had come up with the working basis for an "acceptable" statement. Unfortunately, the voting of Article II, Section 2, Paragraph 2, in spite of the long hours of harangue and parliamentary shenanigans, tells us pitifully little about its "meaningfulness," that is, whether content-wise it says anything significant to us or, in fact, anything at all; and it is this question, it seems to me—"*What does this statement mean?*"—which each of us who thinks words are at all important should feel bound to ask himself before hastily proclaiming (as many of our ministers have done) that "II-2-2," as our statement of purpose is so

euphoniously dubbed, "represents the best possible compromise—*under the present circumstances, of course.*" Personally, I cannot help feeling that the high-pitched emotionalism engendered over whether Jesus should be granted special diplomatic recognition in a modern Unitarian-Universalist affirmation as well as the impassioned, but blantly irresponsible efforts of many delegates to vote merger "no matter what," seriously hampered any really constructive discussion of what exactly this statement of purpose when viewed in its totality expresses. Only twice, as I recall it, was the issue of meaning brought to the floor; and both times it was quickly by-passed. Therefore, it behooves us to raise the question again: what exactly *does* the statement of purpose as approved by the majority of of delegates at Syracuse mean? In brief, what do the collection of words making up Paragraph 2 of Section 2 of Article II signify, if anything? Is something truly important being enunciated here, or have we merely produced what one non-Unitarian-Universalist, on seeing the newly proposed statement of purpose for the first time, labelled "an homogenized mess?"

I.

Now for the sixty-four dollar question: what about this statement? What of its content, its meaning?

The great compromise as adopted at Syracuse reads as follows:

> (We unite)
> "To cherish and spread the universal truths taught by the great prophets and teachers of humanity in every age and tradition and immemorially summarized by the Judeo-Christian heritage as love to God and love to man."

What appears to be intended here? There are, it seems to me, two fundamental but radically different emphases which can be put upon these words. Conceivably they could mean (and I'm not at all convinced that it wasn't interpreted in this way by at least some of the delegates at Syracuse) that all the great truths of all the great prophets and teachers of humanity in all traditions and ages are to be summarized by the Judeo-Christian phrase, "love to God and love to man." No doubt the absurdity of such a rendering of the text need not be labored. Suffice it to say, however, that not only are there many "truths," important to the well-being of our lives, which have absolutely nothing whatever to do with our love for God or for our fellow men; but even the most cursory study of the world's religions would reveal the sheer ignorance of assuming that all great religious insights can be poured into this one, catch-all, Christian phrase. The orthodox Buddhist, the Confucianist, the Scientific Humanist, the Marxist, the Ethical Culturalist hardly would assert that the truths of their religious traditions are magically caught up and summarized by the Judeo-Christian phrase of love to God and love to man, regardless of the latitude in interpretation such a phrase, when artifically abstracted and isolated as it is here, offers; and neither could we honestly, regardless of how syncretistic we might be, assert this for them.

In fact, not even the committed Christian would limit his views of himself or his universe to the specific, ethical injunction of Christ that he love God and his neighbor as himself. After all, there remains for a Christian the recognition of the cosmic fact of God's love for him, of God's healing and transforming presence within the world of men, which though definitely *related to* is certainly not to be *identified with* (except in a very few traditions) the positive human response which he makes to that presence, i.e., his love to God. The Christian has more truth to affirm, more to claim about his relationship to his existence and the ground of that existence than is conveyed in this important but not all inclusive phase. While it is true that he finds his ethical life summarized by Jesus' command that he see his love to God in terms of his concern for men, still the totality of religious truths he asserts is not summarized simply by an ethical affirmation. In fact, his very ability to love his fellow creatures makes sense for him only in terms of another truth, the truth of the divine love for him, the Divine *Agape* which he has already acknowledged and accepted.

There is, however, another way in which Article II, Section 2, Paragraph 2 might be understood. It could be read to mean that we should cherish and spread especially (but not only) those particular universal truths of the great prophets and teachers of humanity which legitimately *can be* summarized by the Judeo-Christian phrase of love to God and love to man; and if it didn't mean at least this much, I would think there would be no necessity for any statement at all. Perhaps this is the kind of interpretation

the majority of delegates at Syracuse placed upon "II-2-2," I don't know. Nevertheless, I would think that even this more fruitful way of rendering our statement of purpose would carry with it a number of difficulties. First of all, the eclectics and pan-religionists among us particularly would object to such exegesis because it focuses on love to God and love to man as defined by our Judeo-Christian heritage as the norm for judging and limiting what "truths" of religious traditions should be especially stressed by Unitarians and Universalists in our day and age, thus giving tacit and possibly "official" priority and sanction to the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. Whatever truths, for instance, the Buddha—one of the patron saints of the universal religionists — may have promulgated, don't seem to make the grade regardless of which way we decide to view this statement. In short, for many of the people in our fellowship this statement is discriminatory whichever way it is read. However, there exists, I believe, a more serious objection to this particular way of understanding our statement of purpose, for I cannot help but feel that it plays so loose and free with the last phrase of the paragraph that it renders the entire statement meaningless.

Let us examine what this final phrase—"immemorially summarized by the Judeo-Christian heritage as love to God and love to man"—might mean to us. Since returning from Syracuse I have put the question of the meaning of this phrase at least a dozen times, and usually I have received in effect this sort of reply: "Why everyone knows what it means; it means precisely what it says: 'love to God and love to man,'" the implication being that throughout our Judeo-Christian heritage the interpretation of Jesus' command has been so unequivocal as to make its meaning self-evident. But actually how unequivocal has it been, really? Jesus first used the phrase to sum up the Jewish law; but any meaning he gave it was seen in the light of his total world view—his transcendent as well as immanent, supernaturalistic God, his view of man's sinfulness and of God's special providence, which even when re-mythologized would present stumbling blocks to a great many modern Unitarians. Yet it is impossible to understand what Jesus' notion of love to God was, for example, without understanding the nature of the object being loved which, of course, is a definite determinant in any expression of what that love actually means. Augustine wrote extensively on the meaning of divine and human love, but any interpretation we might offer concerning exactly what he had to say must be examined in the context of his total theological framework. The same is true of the fourteenth century mystics, of George Fox, Jonathan Edwards, William Temple, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich—all men who have had something constructive to contribute concerning the inter-relationship of human and divine love; yet although all of them stand within the Judeo-Christian tradition, no one studying their works would ever contend that their expressions of what love to God and man actually meant were so similar as to render the differences negligible. Naturally there were common factors considered in any discussion of what this phrase might mean. Usually, except among a certain handful of liberals, human love in our religious tradition has been seen to be in some dynamic relationship to the Divine *Agape;* but how this relationship is to be resolved has differed so extensively among theologians of our Judeo-Christian heritage that any such phrase as love to God and love to man, unless more thoroughly described, tells us practically nothing.

To point up this problem in a more precise manner, is there no difference between viewing man's love for God and his fellow men in terms of God's *electing,* compelling spirit, irresistibly moving man to love, and seeing man's love first as a *free* response to God's ever present love which, only after one has willingly chosen to become a channel for divine grace, flows through him into a concern for his fellow creatures? Is there no difference between the extreme Neo-orthodox notion that God's love for man is a cataclismic supernatural act which, although causing an affirmative response from man, has little if anything to do with human love or even human ethics, and the view that man's love for his fellow creatures has its roots in his natural biological tendencies and his love for God in his natural, created desire for wholeness and fulfillment? Yet all these positions are to be found within our Judeo-Christian heritage.

What essentially I am saying, then, is that when we so glibly announce that we are uniting to cherish and spread those universal truths of the great prophets and teachers of all ages and traditions which are summarized in the Judeo-Christian tradition as love to God and man, we make the error of assuming that the Judeo-Chris-

tian heritage has meant one and only one thing by this last phase. Historically, as we have seen, this is not true. There are many "traditions" in our heritage; and because they have made this phrase so ambiguous, it would seem that we should expect to have it clarified as to which view of love to God and man—which tradition within our tradition—is being referred to here. Jesus'? Augustine's? Barth's? Tillich's? Whose?

But that's the beauty of it all, the supporters of the statement say. One can believe about it whatever he wishes. At Syracuse I remember one delegate declaring that, although the word "God" didn't mean anything to him, he could at least take the phrase to mean what he wanted it to mean. Well, if this is the case, if the phrase is left totally to the whims of our individual interpretations, why mention it at all? Why have any statement? Why talk about *universal* truths summarized as love to God and love to man if that phrase is to be read any way one wishes to read it? Why not, if we must say something, just say that we cherish what we cherish rather than speak about universal truths which in fact are quite particular. Perhaps we should all pause and ask ourselves directly: what *are* such universal truths which are summarized as love to God and love to man, if that final phrase is to be interpreted in any manner we desire to interpret it? What, then, makes them *universal*? Or have we so rewritten English terminology that "universality" and "particularity" mean one and the same thing?

II.

This brings me to what I would consider to be a more general criticism of our entire statement of purpose. My efforts here to analyze a few of the implications of Article II, Section 2, Paragraph 2 have not been an attempt to show that we simply don't know how to word what we want to affirm. Rather it is the heart of my thesis that, as long as we believe that the best possible way to arrive at a meaningful statement of purpose is to distill all the divergent theological positions in Unitarianism and Universalism until the essence somehow is drained off, then a meaningful statement is impossible. One need not travel far to find points of view in present day Unitarianism and Universalism which, from the standpoint of specific theological content, are nearly mutually exclusive. At best, we can say that the area of creedal ground is minimal; and, consequently, any efforts which we might make to gather the distilled fragments into a dynamic statement of faith are bound to fail. The plurality of points of view in our denominations is too great, and no easy reductionism will produce a meaningful, comprehensive statement which can do justice to them all.

But while we do not agree in any extensive sense theologically, there is, it seems to me, at least one area upon which we might agree, and it is to a further delineation of this area that we should look if we are ever to arrive at any adequate statement of what it is that binds us together as an association of individual churches. This area, I believe, is best described by what some liberals have called the "attitudinal" or "methodological" assumptions of our political organization. In other words, there are certain attitudinal principles or concepts underlying our policy which do seem to unite us and these to a certain extent can be demarcated. Now, of course, it is true that any "attitudinal" area of agreement which we might pin-point has its roots deep in the various philosophical and theologial traditions supporting it. For example, there must be sufficient similarities in our views of human nature if agreement at *any* level is to be reached; but rather than attempt the hopeless task of abstracting or distilling from each theological position the so-called points of contract and drawing up a truncated, quasi-theological creedal statement (since for each theological position such "points" are inexorably tied to the total framework of that position and usually make sense only in terms of that framework), perhaps a statement of the "attitudinal" areas of agreement behind our method of church organization might offer us a more fruitful insight into the unifying elements of our fellowship.

We all believe, for example, that the purpose of a church is to provide us with that kind of atmosphere within the structure of a sharing community which permits and encourages us to continue our search for ultimate meaning and purpose in the fullest possible way. Because of certain prior views we have in common about the nature of man and human truth, we believe that the presence of freedom within a religious community is an all-important (although not exclusive) condition for the religious quest. Consequently, we believe congregational polity

to be the best form of church government, and a non-creedal atmosphere to be the most conducive setting for the development of a profound faith. Yet actually, as has already been hinted, our attitudes about the relation of freedom to our polity have their foundation in a more fundamental conviction we share in common — the conviction that human knowledge and therefore our truth judgments and value judgments are fragmentary and tentative, that truth is always partially hidden, and that our lives must be seen in terms of our ever continuous, deepening, free participation in the truths our existence reveals to us. Our religion and our lives are only as deep as our grasp on reality and reality's grasp on us; and because freedom seems to be so much a condition of our search for meaning, the Unitarian and the Universalist, regardless of their specific, theological orientation, find their area of agreement in those attitudes and concepts undergirding the kind of religious institutions they maintain.

Perhaps we can say more than this, I don't know. I'm not convinced, for example, that we possess the common attitude toward rationalism in religion or even toward the dignity and worth of human personality which our official pamphlets claim. Whether the area of agreement outlined above is broad enough or deep enough to continue to bind us in one fellowship in the future, only time will tell.

The third member of the panel, the Reverend Manuel R. Holland, a graduate of Crane Theological School, Tuft's University, has recently been called to The First Parish in Framingham.

Many persons at Syracuse, and elsewhere, were somewhat confused about what Unitarians really are, during the historic convention held in October of this past year. Perhaps no one was quite as confused, however, as a particular elevator operator, who, upon being asked why the elevators were so busy in the conference hotel, replied: "There are a bunch of Ukranians on the tenth floor."

It might be instructive to call to mind the first Unitarian Battle of Syracuse, which was fought in 1866. The cause for the battle? A statement of purposes proposed the year before by the then newly organized national conference of Unitarians. The results of the battle? The conservative majority won, and the dissentors withdrew from the conference and organized the Free Religious Association. For interesting details of this event, I refer you to David Parke's *Epic of Unitarianism.* It is interesting to note that after ninty-three years, the second battle of Syracuse did bring some compromise.

Any discussion of the statement of purpose for the proposed Unitarian Universalist Association should begin with an understanding of the difficulties faced by the Merger Commission. The Commission endeavored to prepare a non-creedal statement of purpose. Traditionally, however, neither denomination has had a non-creedal statement. What the Commission wanted to do, it seems to me, was to present to the two assemblies a political statement of purpose which would reflect the range of thinking within the groups on objectives and commitments, without committting all persons to any particular theological or philosophical concepts. Naturally, this was not an easy task, and the Commission was not wholly successful in its efforts to accomplish it; although the finally approved statement does come fairly close to being a good political statement.

The original statement of purpose proposed by the Merger Commission would have been a better statement of purpose from the political viewpoint; yet, it would have been a break with tradition. I am opposed to radical being made without there being sufficent opportunity for reasoned deliberation. As it was, the opportunists had a heyday in Syracuse, pushing through on the coat tails of a disposition to consolidate all manner of petty changes which would have otherwise been greeted with the derision they deserved.

I personally am opposed to all statements which would commit our members of the national association to any particular theological or philosophical point of view. Such statements, it seems to me, are restrictive. This does not mean, however, that we have no need for well thought out statements of faith. Within our national fellowship, there should be as many statements of religious faith as there are groups committed to different religious positions. These statements should be supported by sound scholarship and strong conviction. The statement which was formed by a small group of students from Harvard Divinity School was welcomed by me last

year. It was, I think, a fine statement of a particular commitment, and I believe that it needed to be distributed. More statements of faith need to be formed, so long as they do not become the "official" position of American Unitarianism or Universalism.

I believe that the finally approved statement of purpose for the new national association, taken as a whole, is an excellent statement. Given the political realities, I hardly see how it could, at this time, be less theological. Certainly I am happy that it is not more theological in its content. At the same time, I hope that all the churches within our association will continue to support their own covenants and traditions. Nothing in the proposed plan for consolidation will prevent local churches from carrying on the emphases which have concerned them in the past. Nationally there has always been a pluralism in our approach and in our objectives; this, I believe is healthy. I hope that it will endure until the force of reason and conviction ultimately brings us closer together on all issues.

The final statement was contributed by the Reverend Ronald M. Mazur, graduate of Boston University and the Harvard Divinity School. Mr. Mazur has been minister of The First Parish in Stow, Mass. for the past two years.

At the last session of the Syracuse Conference, a final effort was made at a compromise statement of purpose which would satisfy both the Unitarians and the Universalists and various groups therein. The proposed compromise called for allegiance to universal truths "immemorially summarized in our Judeo-Christian heritage as love of God and love of man." The situation was desperate and tense, and one delegate proposed an amendment which simply seemed to prolong the agony of the final decision. He suggested that "*our* Judeo-Christian heritage" be changed to "*the* Judeo-Christian heritage". The immediate reaction was that this was mere semantical quibbling and, in the anxious rush for compromise, the amended proposal was accepted by both denominations.

This substitution of three letters for another three letters—the definite article "the" for the possessive pronoun "our"—was a most serious concession. It was the final stumbling block to my acceptance of this statement of purpose. Far from being mere semantics, as Judge Brooks impatiently labeled it, this change struck at the very roots of the entire issue between those who see contemporary Unitarianism within the context and perspective of Christianity, and those who consider modern Unitarianism to be post-Christian in its faith.

Mr. Hoehler has already touched upon some theological implications necessarily contained in the Judeo-Christian heritage. I wish to add to these implications one more class of concepts gathered under the heading "Christology". Within the doctrine of Christianity "Christology" refers to theories concerning the religious significance and function of Jesus—they define his role in the revelation of God's Will and Being to men in history.

Briefly, there are four major types of Christological theory possible, three of which, may be held by Unitarians who consider themselves to be part of the Judeo-Christian heritage. The common orthodox Christology can be labeled JESUS CHRIST, using these words as if they were one name. This is the most apt expression for those who believe that Jesus was God incarnate, both true God and true man. These are the so-called "orthodox" who accept as infallible dogma the creeds of the first seven Ecumenical Councils. Needless to say, those who hold this point of view do not ordinarily consider themselves Unitarians.

The second Christological theory is JESUS AS THE CHRIST. In this view the concept of the Christ is distinguishable from the person of Jesus. This position can be called unitarian, and it represents the views of the two earliest theologians of Christianity, St. Paul and the writer of the *Gospel According to John.* When Paul refers to the Christ as being equal with God, and when John speaks of the Logos as being God, they are not speaking of Jesus. Rather, their concept of the Christ or the Christ-spirit refers to a dimension of the Godhead—His power, His wisdom, and His redeeming love—which they have experienced as revelations through the witness of the life and death of the prophet Jesus. This distinction is crucial to bear in mind: New Testament Christianity is trinitarian (or binitarian) with respect to the nature of the Godhead, that is, it conceives of God in the manifestations of the Father, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit, but it is also unitarian in re-

ference to the significance of Jesus, that is, Jesus was not God but in his life and work and death he manifested God to men. New Testament theology, then, the very source of our Judeo-Christian heritage, does not understand Jesus in the terms of JESUS CHRIST, but rather in the framework of JESUS AS THE CHRIST.

JESUS AS THE CHRIST, however, even in the theology of Paul Tillich, tends to view history in an absolute, one-dimensional fashion. Yes, aspects of God's Being have been revealed to us through Jesus, but the process of the Self-revelation of God through men began before Jesus entered history, and it occurred and occurs in all culture-epochs. Socrates, Gotama, Confucius, Mohammed, including other possible nominees, must all be entered in the Christ Hall of Fame, for certainly, in their culture-epochs, they, too, revealed dimensions of the Godhead to their peoples. And through them, their disciples have experienced the way to personal salvation. In this view the Christological expression becomes JESUS AS A CHRIST. This third position holds in high esteem the others of the world's religions. It recognizes that other religions have their own Christ symbol-pattern. There are infinite facets to reality and fathomless dimensions to God's Being which cannot be exhausted by any one religious system. However, the Unitarians who hold this Christology of JESUS AS A CHRIST often commit the error of calling themselves Universal Religionists, not realizing that those values they adopt from other religions are chosen according to their own Christian philosophical criteria and ethical value judgments. With humility, the Unitarian Christian acknowledges the necessity and the desirability of exchange and interchange of ethical, esthetic, psychological and philosophical insights among the various world religions. This interchange, however, he conducts from the viewpoint of his own commitment rather than trying to practice an esoteric syncretism of all religions.

In any case, I find it necessary to move beyond this point of JESUS AS A CHRIST. For this is a temporary stopping place in religious development from which one enriches his wisdom of God's many dimensions and deepens his love and respect for all the peoples of the world. Momentarily, one has objectified his own religious commitment, suspended it for analytic judgment and correction, and has benefited immensely from the study of other Christs and world religions. But then comes the moment of one's personal life when he must relinquish the role of passive observer of rituals to take that existential step into his own worship life. In the flickering glimpse into the abyss of his own being, he suddenly senses the potential meaninglessness of his own life, in spite of all his rational knowledge of the world's religions, and he actualizes his own self only to the extent that he allows himself to be grasped by the existential myth structure of his religious heritage. It is through the concrete act of genuine worship that JESUS AS A CHRIST becomes JESUS AS MY CHRIST.

Not long ago, while leading an LRY Conference Workshop on the topic of "Building a Faith", this element of concreteness in worship was dramatized for me by the comments of two teen-agers who were struggling to feel a faith in something. One perceptive lad, in an exasperated tone exclaimed, "It's easy for the other Protestants to have something specific to have faith in, for they have Jesus, but we don't have anything to tie down our reason." Another boy said, "It's a common joke among us LRYs that in worship the Jews pray to God, the Protestants pray to Jesus, and the Roman Catholics pray to Mary, but we pray To Whom It May Concern."

JESUS AS MY CHRIST or OUR CHRIST is the mythic expression which provides for me the concrete framework of my faith. I cannot articulate in analytic terms the full depth and existential quality of my relationship with the Godhead, but I can share this qualitative dimension with you by pointing to the Christ Jesus. And I can communicate and share with you this meaning-in-relationship through that community called the Church. It would require volumes of theological dialectic to express my faith that God manifests His power and wisdom through man, but if I point you toward the symbol of the Incarnation you will perhaps know intuitively what I mean. How could I convince you with mere logic that the healing power of redemptive love is available to man in history if I did not have the Cross to point to? And how pedantic and irrelevant would my argument be, that the real self is more than the biological body if I had not the myth of the Resurrection whose existential import we both may share? Perhaps I too, would settle for personal salvation through any

(*Continued on page* 15)

From The President's Desk

In the sixteenth century Poland was one of the most liberal countries in Europe. It is not surprising that Unitarianism had beginnings in this country where religious freedom was the law of the land. However by 1660 orthodoxy had gained such a hold that religious liberals were forced to accept it or have their property confiscated and flee the country. Hundreds of years were to pass before a liberal Polish church was organized. Bishop Hodur who founded the Polish National Catholic Church in the United States in 1897 declared: "The Poles alone have given no national stamp to their religion, because they have not been free to contribute anything creative to it. They blindly received a theological system from Rome, a system alien to their soul, and stopped with that in the march of time, because church dogmas or forms were not to be questioned, still less changed. Their religion, then, became stagnant rather than living and creative.

"The Polish National Catholic Church broke from Rome and became a very liberal Christian church under Bishop Hodur's leadership. Since his death the church has become more and more Roman in practice and gradually given up many of its democratic ideals. But the people, having tasted freedom, and finding it very much akin to their desire for inquiry and the search for truth rebelled against "going back to Rome." In the United States there has been unrest in some of the Polish National Catholic parishes and more than one priest has resigned.

One of those who resigned was Rev. Joseph Alen of South Deerfield, Mass. who after soul-searching re-appraisal, much reading and discussion, had decided that he was a Unitarian. He joined All Souls Church in Greenfield and was later unanimously elected Associate Minister. Not until he was officially a Unitarian did he invite his former parishioners who felt the way he did and thought as he did to become Unitarians. As this goes to press twenty of his most liberal and thoughtful followers have become associate members of All Souls Unitarian Church in Greenfield. Mass.

This was not a hasty or ill-considered action on their part but the result of years of consideration and discussion. For thirteen years Rev. Joseph Alen conducted Teacher Training Classes for his Church School. Actually these were spirited discussion groups which lasted far into the night. Our Beacon Song and Service Book was used in the Church School. Our entire curriculum series was examined and discussed and Unitarian books and pamphlets were frequently discussed. Few can imagine the sacrifice and criticism these new Polish Unitarians have had to face in order to achieve their religious freedom. Their enthusiasm and appreciation is not only heartening but indicates that there are many others like them who would embrace Unitarian Christianity if they knew about it.

Mr. Alen and Mr. Chapman are going to broadcast a Polish-English Unitarian information program over a local radio station and their sermons are being distributed in mimeographed form. Mr. Alen has reason to believe that it will be possible to establish Unitarian Polish Fellowships in a number of cities and is ready to dedicate his life to taking Unitarianism to the Polish people in this country and in Poland who so long ago were among the first to embrace Unitarian ideas.

You will have an opportunity to meet and hear Rev. Joseph Alen at our May Meetings Supper on Sunday May 22 at 5.30 p.m. at the Parish House of the Old South Church, Copley Square in Boston, when he will speak on the subject: "From Authority to Freedom".

—Paul H. Chapman

BOOK REVIEW

MARCH, 1960

THE TRANSCENDENTALIST MINISTERS: Church Reform in the New England Renaissance. By William R. Hutchison. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1959. 24 Opps. $4.50 (Awarded the Brewer Prize Essay of the American Society of Church History)

American Unitarian history, like some great theological drama, has been acted out in a series of curtain-raising scenes with a full *dramatis personae* and with high points of conflict and resolution, but some of these episodes are still very much in need of a critic. With the publication of *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston, 1955), Dr. C. Conrad Wright of the Harvard Divinity School supplied us with a detailed plot of the first act which came to its conclusion at the very threshold of "the Unitarian Controversy", when in 1805 the New England Churches were divided by the election of Henry Ware, a Unitarian, to the Hollis Professorship of Divinity at Harvard.

Apart from the older histories of George A. Ellis (*A Half Century of the Unitarian Controversy,* Boston, 1857) and George W. Cooke (*Unitarianism in America,* Boston, 1902) and of course Earl Morse Wilbur's panoramic and highly condensed second volume history (*A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England, and America,* Cambridge, 1952) the vitally important second act has yet to be chronicled. To be sure there are treatments of this period when New England Unitarianism came of age, but the full dramatic qualities of that era have yet to be properly weighed and recorded.

The Transcendentalist Ministers by William R. Hutchison brings us to the third act when the Unitarian household was itself first disrupted by theological and philosophical forces very much as Unitarianism had previously been disruptive in the larger household of New England Calvinism. In many ways this period is even more interesting than the preceding one. By the 1820's the emancipation from Calvinism had been completed and Unitarian Christianity was fully consolidated in the oldest New England parishes with Boston as its social and cultural center and with Harvard University as its intellectual and theological stronghold. Disturbing this *pax ecclesiae* in 1836 the initial flood of Transcendentalist literature began to flow, creating at first amusement, interest, and finally consternation.

Emerson had already left the ministry of Boston's Second Church when he failed in his hopes to modify the Communion Service. In 1836 after the formation of "The Transcendentalist Club" (or more popularly "The Hedge Club") he published his essay on *Nature,* "the most significant expression of Transcendentalist philosophical ideas to appear in this early period", and this was accompanied by a score of Transcendentalist writings from the pens of Bronson Alcott, William H. Furness, Orestes Brownson, Charles Follen, Convers Francis, and especially Rev. George Ripley's review in the *Christian Examiner* of Martineau's *Rationale of Religious Inquiry.* This last piece, although only a critical book review, raised the question of whether Christianity was dependent on the acceptance of the miracles of Jesus. "Ripley thus brought into public discussion, through the medium of a representative Unitarian publication, the view he had been preaching since 1834 that Christ was simply the enunciator of religious truths which would have been equally valid had he never come."

The reaction to this doctrine came from the citadel of Unitarianism itself. Professor Andrews Norton of the Harvard Divinity School in a series of letters protested vigorously against this "heresy". Most Unitarians, with Norton as their most scholarly defender, (William Ellery Channing was the saint and preacher of the movement) held that Jesus, although not to be identified with God, was nevertheless *the* divinely appointed Savior and Redeemer of mankind, who had proven his supernatural commission by the performance of miracles. The Transcendentalists on the other hand were primarily concerned with abstracting the eternal and ideal character of Christian ethical and moral truths without recourse to the authority of specific and concrete events believed to be true on the basis of Scripture. Individual intuition in this sense replaced Christian tradition as a principal religious authority and guide.

This "transcendentalizing" process led Theodore Parker, who had listened to Emerson's Divinity School Address in 1838, to the idea of "Absolute Religion" which was an immediate

intuitive perception of religious truth given outright to man, and of which Christianity was but one moral or ethical illustration. In its simplest form this meant that the truths of Christianity bore only an historically accidental relation to Christ himself, and although most of the Transcendentalists had the highest veneration for the man Jesus, nevertheless his person was clearly subordinate to the ethics he enunciated.

A complicated theological battle ensued which literally filled the pages of the *Christian Examiner* and the *Christian Register* between the proponents of Unitarian Christianity and their Transcendentalist adversaries. Dr. Hutchison has given us an admirably lucid blow by blow account of these exchanges, critically weighing both sides of the argument. Professor Norton, "the Unitarian Pope", is more fairly pictured here than in later partisan accounts of the controversy which deal with his strong opposition to Emerson's *Divinity School Address* which he characterized as *The Latest Form of Infidelity!* In fact, Dr. Hutchison interprets the issues at stake with a dimension of depth which makes them highly pertinent for contemporary Unitarians. The conservative Unitarians were not just battling for a literalistic adherence to Scripture, for they were as cognizant as the Transcendentalists of the principles of Biblical criticism, but they were fighting for the very substance of an organic revealed Christian faith, rationally interpreted and institutionally structured in the Church.

The Transcendentalists, on the other hand, and particularly Emerson and Parker, were advocating an intuitive Theism, which to many appeared hardly distinguishable from Pantheism, divorced wholly from any concrete appreciation of the Christian revelation. This advocacy on Parker's side was made under the Unitarian charter of "free enquiry". The question which the Transcendentalist Controversy raised was really that of the seat of authority in religion. If "free enquiry" takes one wholly outside of Christianity (even liberal Christianity) is the Church really bound to include and support or, rather, to exclude and deny fellowship to the "enquirer"? If transcendental intuition conflicts with confessional faith which shall be given the priority? The fact that Parker could find few men willing to exchange pulpits with him testifies to the Unitarian clerical reaction to the 1840's, but his Boston Melodeon congregation of almost fifteen hundred members reveals his popularity.

The mediating labors of Frederic Henry Hedge and James Freeman Clarke domesticated, or one might say "parochialized" the more enduring Transcendentalist reforms, and ultimately their work proved the most fruitful from a denominational point of view. Each of these men had been within the Transcendentalist circle, but unlike Emerson and Ripley they had kept their ministries, and unlike Parker, they had accomplished reforms within the Church without radical transformations. Their "Broad Church" or "latitudinarianism" was flexible but at the same time avowedly Christian, and their idea of the liberal church was a comprehensive one featuring "the Catholic principle of universality, the Orthodox Protestant understanding of sin and the supernatural, Unitarian liberality, and the Transcendentalist emphasis upon Divine immanence." This type of "broad" Untarianism was finally given organizational acceptance and sanction at the first National Conference meeting in 1865.

The drama of Untarianism from this period of comparative peace and extensive growth until 1897 belongs to Act IV of our history, and is therefore only touched upon lightly by Dr. Hutchison. A fuller treatment of the radical reaction stemming from Parker's influence is found in Stowe Person's *Free Religion, an American Faith* (New Haven, 1947) which is, unfortunately, out of print. Another valuable study covering this period is Charles H. Lyttle's *Freedom Moves West,* a history of the Western Unitarian Conference. (Boston, 1952)

For Unitarians today the problems raised by the Transcendentalist Controversy have never really been solved. A balance of denominational power has uneasily shifted back and forth between a more strongly "confessional" camp and a "free enquiry" camp. The re-absorption back into the denomination of the "Free Religionists" actually accomplished a victory for Parker, as present Article I of the A.U.A.'s By-Laws makes clear in its purposes and objectives. But, as current May Meetings have witnessed, the tensions between a confessionally Christian position and a definitely non-Christian platform continue to strain the religious loyalty of the denomination.

Dr. Hutchison has done us a great service by his impartial examination of this very significant period in our history. He has incisively laid bare the more enduring issues between a liberal Christianity and a religious liberalism both contending in the same household of faith for

(*Continued on page* 16)

Editor's Mail Box

[The Editor welcomes correspondence from readers of *The Unitarian Christian.* Such correspondence as may be of general interest will appear in this column.]

Sir:

In sending the enclosed checque. I am continuing my membership in the U.C.F., which I think is specially needed these days, when the influx into the Unitarian Church of new members, many of whom know little of Unitarian history and doctrine, is, to my mind, having an unfortunate effect on the denomination.

Sincerely yours,

Katherine B. Webster
305 North Mountain Ave.
Upper Montclair, N.J.

Sir:

I have heretofore been an assiduous reader of The Unitarian Register. I have sensed that the strong current of humanism running through it is brushing aside those who affirmatively uphold that the spirit of truth, which is the spirit of love, emanates from a source—beyond man's sole intellectual apprehension.

I am not far from concluding that the mitigated acceptance of "religion with God" is just a mere courtesy, the root of which connects to a deep, unconscious desire to stamp out beliefs in any kind of spirituality whatsoever.

Religion is with God or is not at all. Having resolutely affirmed IT, I doubt very much if I can get any understanding from the "tolerant humanism" so characteristic of the Register.

I am enclosing $1.00 for one year's subscription; please start it with whatever issue is available.

Sincerely yours,

John F. Mitton
2402 Norcross Rd.
Erie, Penna.

Sir:

The Secretariat of the International Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom, IARF, has read with great interest the article about its Sixteenth Congress in Chicago last summer, which was published in the Fall 1958 issue of your magazine. With the permission of the Rev. Scovel we re-published this article in our NEWS DIGEST of which we are sending you a copy today (by ordinary mail).

As the IARF Secretariat is very much interested in the contents of your periodical we would like to propose that you send us regular copies in exchange for a regular sending of our own periodical of IARF, NEWS DIGEST, to you.

Awaiting your favorable reply, we remain,

Yours sincerely,

International Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom
I.A.R.F.
A. F. Leemans
The Hague, Holland

Sir:

It amazed me to see the prejudice and narrow-mindedness of those opposing Unitarian-Universalist merger. Two supposedly liberal, non-creedal religions which have both been attacked consistently by orthodox trinitarian Christians get petty when they promote their needle-point views of their religions . . . I happen to be a Unitarian Quaker . . . In the Religious Society of Friends we have both the trinitarian and the unitarian beliefs, and we meet in good will and fellowship. The oneness of God should be felt by all . . .

Chauncey O. Reinhart
220 Park St.
Roselle, N.J.

Editorial

(*Continued from page* 2)

much in the other religions of the world that is not primitive and mythological. They lack what might be called an adequate view of God and man. We do not and cannot embrace other religions equally.

Take a few cases in point. We have not seen any of our liberals defend the principal tenet of Hinduism—the caste system. We have not seen any of our intellectuals reflecting the main teachings of Mohammed that Allah is God and that Mohammed is his prophet—that the affairs of men and nations are decided by fatalism and that women are inferior entities in the human family. Mohammed taught men never to drink alcohol and never to question the words of the prophet as discussions are foolishness when God has already spoken. We do not know any intellectual who is practicing and teaching these things.

Buddha taught many things, but foremost in his teaching is the subjugation of the self and the overcoming of desire. We have not seen any Unitarians or Universalists practicing anything that resembles the ascetic type of life as of the highest order. Buddha did have some other teachings that parallel some of our own, but meditation and suppression of desire do not fit in any liberal pattern that we know about.

Confucius taught filial obedience and family loyalty as the foundation of his system of ethics. We have not seen any Unitarians paying the bills for their deceased cousins as faithful Confucians are supposed to do. In fact, we think the idea that we embrace all religions equally is a lot of stuff and nonsense that bespeaks more of sentiment than it does of virtue.

Unitarian and Universalist Churches spring from the Christian tradition. They may deny it or by-pass and ignore it, but their thought patterns and systems of value are from the roots of the Christian cultus. Christianity was the resulting synthesis when Hebrew righteousness met Greek idealism at right angles. . . . An ethic and a culture have resulted in the highest type of civilization the world has ever known. We are not saying that all is perfect and that there is no weakness. We belong to the liberal strain, too, believing that revelation is continuous and that truth grows from age to age; but to deny that our foundations are Christian seems slightly stupid if not down-right dishonest.

Our history and our culture have the Bible as the foundation of our life. To ignore this is something again showing a lack of gratitude and perhaps a shortage of information. We are Unitarians, not because we know nothing of the Bible but because we know a little more about it. We need not discard this ancient book because we happen to understand it. We must reinterpret it and use its values to bring greater respect and deeper understanding to the cause we serve. The trouble is that altogether too many have cut themselves entirely loose from their foundations, and that contributes not to strength but to weakness.

The main reason we are in existence is to cherish and spread religion worthy of reverence. This merger has negatively by-passed the historic position of both denominations. The idea that we embrace al religions equally is not realistic. The Unitarian and Universalist Churches are from Christian backgrounds and share the teachings of Jesus with biblical foundations. To depart from our backgrounds is to disavow our common interests.

—James K. Allen

Syracuse

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of the world's religions, but I am saved from the hopelessness of this relativism because the myth of the Kingdom of God tells me that salvation is not only personal, but historical and communal.

The Judeo-Christian heritage has a claim on me, and through it, I have found what I consider to be the most reasonable of faiths, Unitarian Christianity. I am grieved, therefore, by the attempt of the Unitarian Universalist Association to force me out of this heritage with a mere substitution of *the* for *our*. Clearly, this is a move to objectify the Judeo-Christian heritage on an impersonal basis under the belief that Unitarianism is beyond Christianity. But I am confident that the Unitarian Christian perspective will ultimately prevail throughout Christian theology, and I am also convinced that the so-called "post-Christians" have nothing significant to say which cannot and is not said more dynamically, sensitively, and more comprehensively within Unitarian Christianity.

Nevertheless, for various reasons, I remain in favor of consolidation even under such an in-

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Syracuse

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adequate Statement of Purpose, prayerfully hoping that the new Association will eventually concede the meaninglessness of the statement under consideration and struggle for a new formulation of purpose based on either the doctrine of the Church or on the jurisprudence of Voluntary Associations.

Book Reviews

(*Continued from page* 13)

primary allegiance. Whether or not the solution of the moderate party of the 1850's will again prevail it is impossible to foresee. From the point of view of the present reviewer we might do well to re-examine it and bring it up to date.

Harry M. Stokes

A PRAYER FOR EASTER

O Lord, our God, we celebrate with gladness and joy the coming of that great hope of everlasting life which is the Easter Gospel. As Christ rose triumphant over failure and sin, and the bonds of death and the tomb, and victoriously claimed eternal life, so we, Thy humble children, pray that we may share with our elder Brother, Christ, his sufferings and hopes, and bravely bear our cross, and be faithful even unto death, that we may be worthy also to share with him and with faithful souls in every age that same eternal life. In the faith and hope we rejoice this day, and for Thy dear Christ we give Thee thanks, for in his name we make this Easter prayer. Amen.

UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
102 Mt. Vernon Street, Boston 8, Mass.

Enclosed is $3. Please enroll me as a member of the Fellowship and send me the *Unitarian Christian* for one year.

Name .....

Address .....